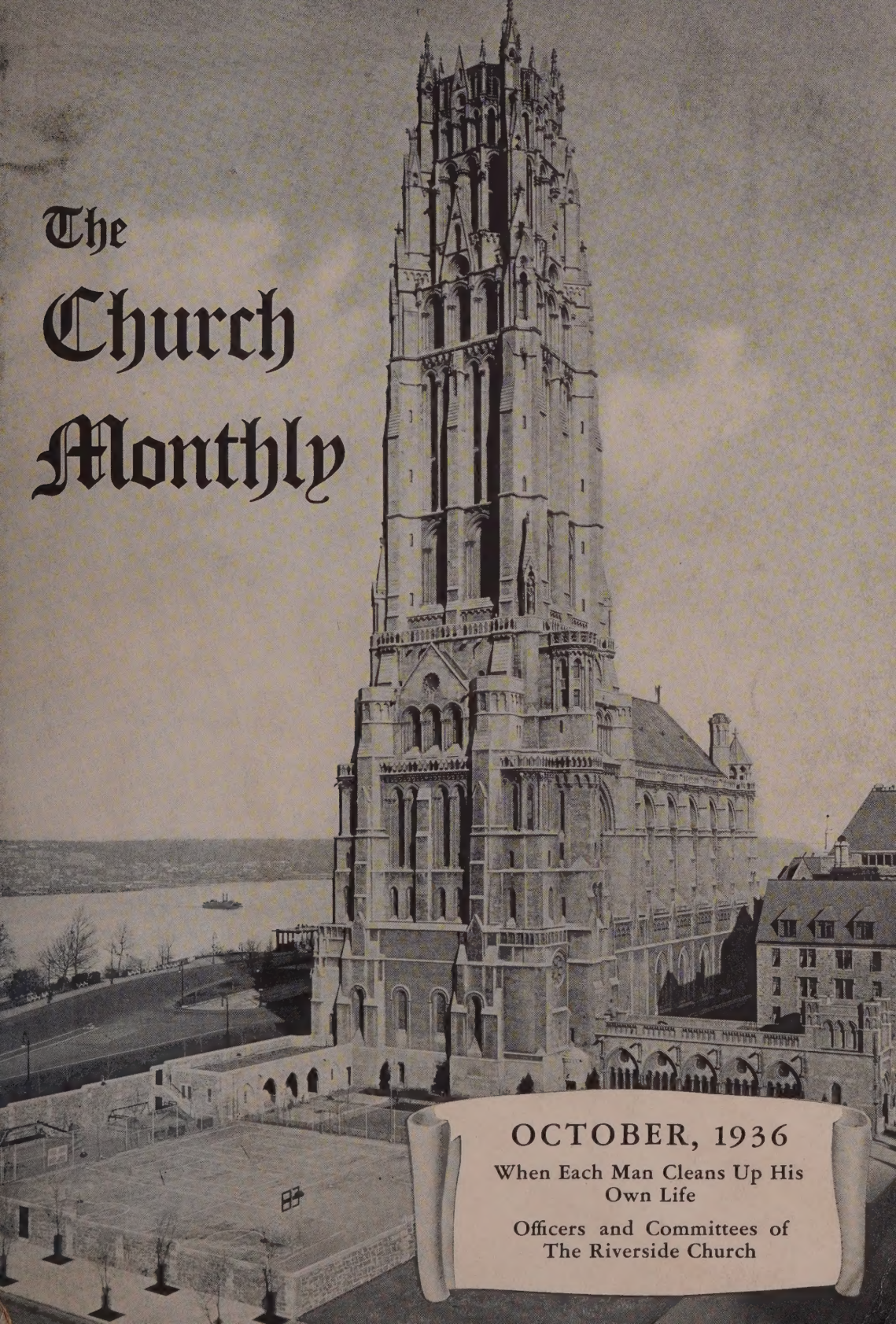
The Church Monthly



OCTOBER, 1936

When Each Man Cleans Up His Own Life

Officers and Committees of The Riverside Church

The Church Monthly

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OLD TESTAMENT PROPHETS

Isaiah, Jeremiah, Hosea, Amos, and Micah as they appear in stone at the left of the main doorway.

When Each Man Cleans Up His Own Life

By Harry Emerson Fosdick

Some one has said of Jesus that, whenever he met any one, it was as though that person were an island around which Jesus sailed until he saw where the real problem was—and then he landed. He did that with the rich young ruler and landed on the money question. He did that with the woman of Samaria and landed on the family question. He did that with Zacchæus and landed on the problem of honesty. There was a personal penetration in Jesus' dealing, a clairvoyant realism in getting at what was really the matter with the individuals he touched, which made him terrible to any one who did not wish to be brought face to face with himself.

This personal dealing one misses in many a modern church. A great setting the church may have, and numerous companies of people may come and go, but one knows that if Jesus were there one thing would immediately begin happening which is not so poignantly happening now. Were Jesus dealing with us here today, for example, we would cease being a multitude and would become individuals. He would so look at us as individuals that we could not forbear so looking at ourselves. We might resent and resist it—we probably would—but unless we ran away from him we could not escape him. Again and again he would sail around our lives until he saw where the real problem was and then he would land.

If this penetrating personal dealing is not the central business of a vital religion, then what is a vital religion all about? Yet at least for two reasons we habitually resent and resist it. For one thing, we do not like to be brought to grips with ourselves. An interesting revelation of human nature is presented in the chronological order in which the great sciences developed. Which science came first? Astronomy. Our first scientific knowledge concerned the things which were farthest away. And after that? Geology, a little closer in, the story of the ancient background of our earth. And after that? Biology, a little closer in, the story of the world of life which has preceded us. And after that? Sociology, in any scientific sense, still closer in, the story of the human setting into which our lives are born. And, last of all, emerging only yesterday, postponed for centuries by our emotions and prejudices about ourselves, making us unable or unwilling honestly to face ourselves, came Psychology. The realm farthest off came first, the realm nearest at hand—ourselves—came last. It is as though even in science men for centuries had fought against coming to grips with themselves. Look inside your own life and see if this is not a true parable of all of us. The last man any of us wants to meet, so clairvoyantly seen that his real problems stand plainly out, is himself.

For another reason we resent the penetrating personal dealing which is involved in vital religion. We have a contemporary alibi. Our problems today, we say, are social. I can remember

the time when the distinctive Christian message was intensely, unhealthily individualistic, presenting to souls a personal gospel of salvation from the world with no corresponding social gospel for the world itself. But now the shoe is on the other foot. Then it was as much as a man could do to get a hearing for the social gospel; now in some quarters it is as much as a man can do to get a hearing for that kind of personal dealing which the Master practised when he sailed around a man's life until he saw where the real problem was and then came ashore, as though to say, Whatever other responsibilities you may have your own life is primary. I should not dare to preach the sermon I am going to preach today if you had not many times heard here the social gospel, the responsibility of Christians not only for the souls but for the societies of men, with their monstrous evils which damn souls by millions. But, my friends, Christianity is not simply a wholesale business. It is a retail business too.

Charles Kingsley was one of the pioneers and prophets of the social gospel in the nineteenth century but once, when he was asked what kind of character he disliked most, he immediately answered, "My own." For such honest dealing with oneself, and for the cleaning up of one's own life that should come in consequence, I plead today.

If some one is thinking of a text, one is waiting in the initial and continuing message of the Master as he came into Galilee, saying, "Repent ye; for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." That is to say, just because God's kingdom is at hand, because a new social order must arise, because we are at the end of an era and are living in wracked and troubled days from whose travail a new epoch must be born, therefore let each man look to himself. Repent—change your mind—clean up your own life.

Consider in the first place the backing this emphasis receives from the obvious fact that the first responsibility of every man is himself. Whatever else John Smith has been responsibly entrusted with, first of all comes John Smith. Indeed, I venture today to preach in this regard a kind of healthy egoism. For who has not seen an unhealthy and exaggerated altruism which makes a man feel responsible for almost everybody else on earth except himself? Such a man thinks he is generously caring for the world, whereas, by one of the most familiar tricks that the mind plays upon itself, what he really is doing is to use his care for the world at large as a place of escape from and a means of compensation for the lack of the far more exacting task of resolutely and effectively taking charge of himself.

When the Bible, Old Testament or New, proclaims healthy altruism, it couples with it healthy egoism. "Thou shalt love . . . thy neighbor as thyself"—that is, care for yourself first; take charge of yourself first; then you have a place to start from and a standard of judgment concerning your care for your neighbor. When, on the contrary, one sees people who in their far-reaching altruism are fooling themselves, one often wishes to say that whether or not charity begins at home, certainly character does and that, whether or not the world at large needs to be changed, certainly *they* need to be changed.

Ibsen, the dramatist, was interested in Brandes, the novelist, when Brandes was a youth, and Ibsen wrote to his young friend a letter with a ringing message in it which any youth might

take to heart. "What I chiefly desire for you," said Ibsen, "is a genuine, full-blooded egoism, which shall force you for a time to regard what concerns you yourself as the only thing of any consequence, and everything else as non-existent . . . . There is no way in which you can benefit society more than by coining the metal you have in yourself." So!

This becomes intimately personal to me as I look out on this congregation and see the young men and women here. Probably no one sails around a life and sees where its real problems are more constantly than a mother. That is her constant preoccupation. When childhood has passed and young manhood or young womanhood arrives and you come to New York City, still she goes on sailing around your life, by intuition often, if she is a wise mother, knowing before you do where the real problem is. Sometimes she writes to me about it. She hears me over the air and, because I am in New York and you are in New York, she writes to me about you, and always her concern is like Ibsen's for his friend—about what is happening inside you, about what you are doing with yourself.

I had a letter recently from a man who in his youth had sailed a fishing schooner with his father in the North Atlantic. One night, he says, near the Arctic Circle, after the dark came down, the fog closed in and the seas ran high. "I was at the wheel," he writes, "doing my best to keep her on her course and my father was standing close by. He knew that we were in for a bad night. 'Well,' said my father, 'about this time the little woman at home is offering up her prayer for us to the God who holds the waves in the hollow of his hand,' and then, after a pause, he cried, 'All hands on deck, put a close reef in the mainsail and let run the jib, we have got to get that prayer answered.'"

I happen to know that prayers are being offered for some of you—parents for children, wives for husbands, husbands for wives, sometimes children for fathers and mothers—about what you are doing to yourself. I want some personal decisions here this morning about that, each man saying to his own soul, All hands on deck! we have got to get that prayer answered!

Consider, again, the backing that is given to this emphasis by the fact that there is no social sin whose central responsibility is not inside individuals. A lot of nonsense is talked these days about social sin, as though society were a kind of organism or personality that could be of itself moral or immoral apart from the persons who compose it, whereas the fact is that all goodness and badness are first of all inside individuals and only secondarily in their relationships.

Indeed, let a sociologist speak to us about this. Professor Henry Pratt Fairchild is a progressive—I do not know that he would mind being called a radical—sociologist, and when he tries to tell us what *the* social problem is, with *the* italicized, this is what he says: "To bring such influence to bear upon every individual that he will submit tractably to the regulation that is necessary for all, and display the kind of behavior that is requisite of all, is the greatest problem that society has to face—it is *the* social problem." So, even to a sociologist the social problem concerns the kind of personal intelligence, character, and behavior we can depend upon. To be sure, we know what is meant by a social sin. War is a social sin, so like a tidal wave when it arises

that it seems to be fated by some evil God, but war is the outcome of the way multitudes of individuals behave. Economic evil is a social sin that like the driving dust upon the Western prairies blasts multitudes of lives, but, after all, economic evil springs from the way multitudes of individuals behave and think.

This does not mean, of course, that if every individual were what is called a good character that by itself alone would solve our social problem. On the contrary, while every stone in this church is a good stone, still those stones had to be put together along right structural lines to make the church. Even if every individual on earth were a good character, we still should face the huge and exacting task of economic and international organization. In society, however, it is the living stones that must organize themselves, so that we are back again at our primary dependence on personal intelligence and personal character. Any way you get at it, Professor Fairchild is right—the social problem inheres in begetting in individuals the kind of behavior that is requisite for all.

The full recognition of this fact would smash up one of the favorite alibis of our times. Multitudes of people stand today looking at society as though it were an organism apart from themselves, and they blame on *that* their personal moral failure. Were Jesus here, however, the first thing he would do would be to sail around the individual until he saw the real problem and then land, saying, Here and here in you are all the ideas and attitudes and immoralities that, pooled and massed together, make every social sin there is.

Over against our contemporary alibi, which sometimes seems to say, Society is very bad and we as individuals would be lovely characters if only society would let us, I venture to paint another picture altogether. Society is not all bad. Taken as a whole, society has made amazing progress. Said one man to another, "Things are not as they used to be." "No," was the answer, "and they never were." Any one who knows history must understand that even now more individuals in America have an opportunity for a fulfilled life than probably ever was true anywhere at any time before. In Queen Elizabeth's day the average length of human life was twenty years; now the average white man of twenty has an even chance to live to be sixty-nine. That is only a parable of the way society as a whole has forged ahead and presented enlarged opportunities for life and self-fulfillment. If, therefore, one is going to personalize society at all, I would picture society as trying to struggle ahead, while the massed interior attitudes of multitudes of individuals hold it back.

Society, for example, is forging ahead toward a world community. Physically we have a world community now. Scientific inventions bind us together. Intercommunications link us into an interdependent neighborhood. Physically we have a world community, so that every day, more and more, mankind becomes an intermeshed and reticulated nervous system in which what happens anywhere is felt everywhere. If you ask what is keeping society back as it struggles toward a world community, the answer should be plain. The massed, interior attitudes of individuals. Physically we are a neighborhood; psychologically we are not neighborly. Society has crowded us together before as individuals we have become fit to live together. The limits of the world

community are no longer physical; they are psychological. The trouble is inside ourselves. Listen to people talk and note the littleness, the prejudice, the cynicism, the racial hatred, the nationalism. These are the barriers to a world community. Get that picture, I beseech you: society struggling to move forward and held back by the multiplied attitudes of individuals.

I cannot do for you in this regard what the Master would do if he were here. I wish I could. He came preaching the kingdom of God, a new social order for the world, but he had an uncanny insight that antedated by centuries the kind of things that the sociologists are learnedly saying now. Moreover, he had a strange magnetic power so that wherever he went he left behind him trails of individuals who had been forced to come face to face with themselves and repent because the kingdom of God was coming. I dare to hope that here today he may so deal with the consciences of some of us that we will have what our fathers used to call conviction of personal sin and conversion of personal character. If he should sail around your life, do you know where he would land?

Once more, consider the backing this emphasis receives from the fact that no social order will ever come or can ever come that will relieve individuals from this necessity of cleaning up their own lives. In Thackeray's novel, *Vanity Fair,* Becky Sharp thinks that she could be a good woman on five thousand pounds a year. Many people fool themselves like that, whereas any one knowing Becky Sharp would know that, put her anywhere with any income in any heavenly circumstances, and her moral problem still would be the need of a profound, radical transformation of character.

One of the earliest recollections of my boyhood is being taken by my family on a gala day to what was then called a "Wonderland." I can see myself yet walking down that corridor, watching a young boy coming toward me from the other end, suspiciously wondering who he was, what he was doing there, and why he kept heading in toward me, till with a crash I ran into myself in a mirror. And because I have been doing that ever since, no matter what the circumstances have been—sometimes troublous and difficult, sometimes prosperous and full of opportunity—always running into myself as the decisive factor in the case, I am sure it is the unescapable determinant of a man's destiny, unpopular though it is to say that now.

I am not forgetting that there are millions on earth with no fair chance in life. You have often heard me talk about that aspect of the matter. Like creeping sands of the desert, which, when once they are on the move, crawl with inexorable deadliness to blot out all beauty and all hope, some social situations exist against which the individual strives in vain. Such one often finds in city slums, but we are not in city slums. Such one finds among the share-croppers, but we are not share-croppers. I am not talking to people who are absent this morning; I am talking to people who are here. And so far as we are concerned, I venture that, taking human history on the average, not one man in a million in mankind's record has ever had any fairer chance at life than we have had. The trouble with most of us is that we keep running into ourselves in a mirror.

Many people these days come to see the minister, all cynical about the world. What a world! they say. How do you expect anybody to be decent or

courageous or hopeful or devoted to high aims in a world like this? And as they pour out their cynicism and disgust about the world it is necessary in all honesty to say to them this unpalatable thing: You think you are telling me something about the world; you are telling me nothing about the world; the world is what it is, in some ways better, in some ways worse, than it used to be, probably in general more promising; but you are telling me a lot about yourself, about the kind of person you are and about what you are letting the world do to you because you are that kind of person. If people understood that cynicism about the world carries no news about the world at all but tells a lot of news about the cynic, they would not talk so much. As every psychologist knows, disillusioned denunciation is mostly self-revelation.

Indeed, let our imaginations run out now for a moment to that better social order in which we think it would be easier to be good. There are Utopias of escape amid whose fantastic castles in Spain men run away from life's realities, but there are Utopias of reconstruction which to the builder of a better day are like the vision of the perfected statue to the sculptor as he chips the stone, or as the yet unheard harmonies of the symphony to the creative musician as he toils. What, then, is this distinctive quality of the better day for society of which you dream, when it will be easier to be good? Surely the essence of it is the coöperative spirit. Some day we think we will have a friendlier world, a finer family life, more neighborly cities, an economic order where dog-eat-dog competition will be replaced by coöperation, and no more war, because the nations will have learned to live at peace together. Is not that spirit, however you formulate its details, the essence of all our Utopias of reconstruction?

So, we think, in such a world it would be easier to be good. To be sure it would. There are souls going all to pieces now that there would have their chance. There are frustrated personalities who never get out of them now the best in them who there would coin their precious metal into currency. There are millions of spirits crushed now who there would rise and shine. This is true. But it is only half the truth. The other half is that a world like that, so kind, so neighborly, so coöperative, would not automatically run itself as though it were a machine. It would take marvelous personal character in multitudes of individuals—devoted, unselfish, disciplined, free from littleness and prejudice—to sustain a world like that. Underline this, my friends, for it is a neglected emphasis: *The better the social order we achieve, the finer personal character will be demanded to sustain it.* Not less, mark it, but more, as society improves, character far-seeing, all inclusive, profoundly loving, will be demanded, the kind of character, that is, which you cannot get anywhere at any time save as individuals grapple with their own lives.

Perhaps the commonest message we hear today in this realm is that if we change circumstances we change persons. That is true but it is only half the truth. Not only is it true that if we change circumstances we change persons; it is also true that if we change persons we change circumstances. Today I am not talking to circumstances as though I would say, O circumstances, change yourselves and so change persons, but I am talking to persons, living persons, so that there is some fair chance of getting effective consequence from

(*Continued on page 245*)

Prayer

By Harry Emerson Fosdick

Eternal Spirit, from everlasting to everlasting the God of the world and the refuge and citadel of those who put their trust in Thee, we turn to Thee. We do not pray that we may change Thy will. Thy will is first and our wishes are far second. It is in vain we pray if we press our wishes on Thee, but we pray that Thy will may be released in us.

From our stubbornness and inhospitality we seek to be delivered, that our lives may be a free channel down which Thy purpose may flow. Grant us receptivity, hospitality, and responsiveness of soul as we worship, so that Thy will may be done in us, through us and for us, and so released into Thy world.

We pray for our churches that Thy purpose may be wrought out through them. In penitence we confess they have not known what spirit they are of. Born out of the love of Christ, too often they have denied him, been untrue to him, misrepresented him. We lift up to Thee the stubbornness and obduracy of Thy church and pray again that Thy will may be done through Thy people, that in generosity, magnanimity, and unselfish sacrifice they may be recovered to the spirit of their Lord, that the will of the living God may be liberated into this world through Thy church.

We pray that Thy will may be done through the nation. We lay on the high altar of the church our anxieties about our nation. It is not well with this people, O God. In integrity of character and righteousness of public life we have not risen to our privilege or to Thy demands, and it is not well with us. We pray that there may arise in Israel men who know what Israel ought to do. Against all that is evil, obdurate, and unteachable in us, we pray that the will of the living God may be liberated in this nation.

Especially we beseech Thee for those who find it hard to offer this prayer for themselves. In some Gethsemane, facing some crushing trouble, the prayer, "Thy will, not mine, be done," chokes upon their lips. O God, under their olive trees let some angel minister to them! Grant them vision, wisdom, fortitude, and courage adequate to their need! May some soul here, unwilling to face duty or to bear hardship, find that prayer again, "Not my will, thine, be done."

Enlarge the borders of our sympathy and greaten the horizons of our solicitude and care until nothing that is human is alien to us. May we perform here in the sanctuary an act of compassion and goodwill toward all sorts and conditions of men, across every line of prejudice and partisanship, that all souls may be taken up into our prayer and lifted in our intercession. Then help us in the world to live as we have prayed, in the spirit of Christ. Amen.

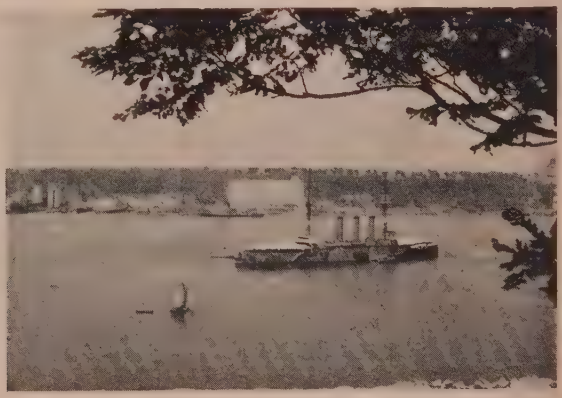
DURING the last week of August two Japanese training ships with 1500 men aboard were stationed in the Hudson River opposite The Riverside Church.

These two coast defense vessels, the "Iwate" and the "Yakuno," were launched at the turn of the century, and both have distinguished records of long and honorable service. Both ships were engaged in the battle of the Sea of Japan in 1905 and were in active service in the World War. They also were engaged in relief work at the time of the great earthquake in Japan in 1921.

It is the first time in seven years that Japanese war vessels have visited New York, and much ceremony attended their visit.

The picture above shows the "Iwate," the flagship of the squadron, firing a gun salute as officials go aboard.

The training cruise began last June, visits having been made to Seattle, San Francisco, Los Angeles, the Canal Zone, Havana, and Baltimore. New York was the last city they visited in the United States.



Snapshots by Ashley Hastings

Officers and Committees of The Riverside Church

We are publishing in this issue of THE CHURCH MONTHLY, as is our custom each Fall, a list of the officers of the church and the various auxiliary organizations, together with the committees appointed by these respective groups.

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WHEN EACH MAN CLEANS UP HIS OWN LIFE

(Continued from page 236)

our meeting here, if we will take the latter half of that truth in earnest—Change persons and you change circumstances.

I want some personal conversions here this morning. I want the spirit of Christ, as he sails around our lives, with clairvoyant eye seeing where the problem is, to be welcome when he lands.

Dr. Fosdick preached the foregoing sermon March 8, 1936.

▽ ▽ ▽

The Riverside Vacation School

DURING the summer the Church held its first Vacation School for the children in the neighborhood who for one reason or another were spending the hot season in the City. For seven weeks a happy group of children, ranging in age from the kindergarten level through that of the eighth grade, gathered five mornings a week and worked and played together for three hours.

The children's interests were sustained as they realized they were learning about adventurous men and women of whom their usual day schools told them nothing. The discovery of some of the personalities whom the Riverside Church had chosen to honor in its chancel screen and in its other statues quickened the curiosity of the boys and girls. Through stories told in the services of worship each morning, through trips to museums and health centers and hospitals, and through classroom study of books and magazines, the children became acquainted with quite a long number of challenging leaders among whom Jesus was given a natural place. The teaching staff sought to encourage the study of men and women who had been what we called "social and spiritual inventors"—people who had led mankind forward toward more worthy ways of living together—rather than to duplicate the work of the day schools in emphasizing primarily those who had made significant contributions in the more tangible realm of the physical sciences.

As a result of the summer's work five great men were dwelt upon with much thoroughness—Galileo, Vesalius, St. Francis, David Livingstone, and Dr. Adolf Lorenz. Four dramatizations featuring four of these men were created by the several classes making

these studies, and with a genuine child-like art they were presented to the other members of the school with parents and friends also participating.

During the last two weeks the entire group of children, ranging from seven-year-olds through eighteen-year-olds, united in a large endeavor to summarize the most important parts of their learnings in the form of four big murals. These were planned and executed by the children themselves under a creative type of leadership and represent the five great personalities mentioned above.

A final dramatic service was held to honor these men of greatness by whom the children had been impressed and to present these four murals to the care of the Church. They may be seen from time to time in the assembly room on the tenth floor.

A Ceremony in Honor of Great Men As Pictured in Four Murals

By the Riverside Vacation School, *Friday Morning, August 21, 1936*

Children's Processional

Two torchbearers leading, followed by the five great characters in costume—St. Francis, David Livingstone, Andreas Vesalius, Galileo Galilei, and Adolf Lorenz—and all the children of the School.

Standing in two groups on opposite sides of the room, they sang:

"Now praise we great and famous men,
The fathers named in story;
And praise the Lord who now as then,
Reveals in man his glory.
Praise we the wise and brave and strong,
Who graced their generation;
Who helped the right and fought the wrong,
And made our folk a nation." (1)

Second stanza sung on steps of stage.

"Praise we the great of heart and mind,
The singers sweetly gifted,
Whose music like a mighty wind,
The souls of men uplifted.
Praise we the peaceful men of skill
Who builded homes of beauty,
And, rich in art, made richer still,
The brotherhood of duty." (1)

Third stanza sung after chorus had reached their seats. (All audience asked to join in the singing.)

"Praise we those men who searched for truth
Beyond their ancient learning,
Who spoke their thought sincerely forth,
Imprisoned,—falsehood spurning.
Praise we the courage of their minds,

Andreas Vesalius, as a visiting professor to the University of Paris, is dissecting a human body before a class who previously had seen only animals dissected—Scene from play given by fifth-grade boys.

Who broke outworn tradition,
Who showed new facts for all mankind,
And bettered our condition." (2)

THE MURALS IN HONOR OF GREAT MEN WERE EXPLAINED

Trumpet call from the piano,
First speaker—Mural of St. Francis and David Livingstone.

Trumpet call from the piano,
Second speaker—Mural of Andreas Vesalius.

Trumpet call from the piano,
Third speaker—Mural of Galileo Galilei.

Trumpet call from the piano,
Fourth speaker—Mural of Adolf Lorenz.

SONG (Entire audience standing.)

"Praise we the glorious names we know;
And they whose names have perished—
Lost in the haze of long ago—
In silent love be cherished.
In peace their sacred ashes rest,
Fulfilled their day's endeavor;
They blessed the earth and they are blessed
Of God and man forever." (1)

PRESENTATION OF MURALS TO THE CARE OF THE CHURCH—FRANCIS DINGWALL

RESPONSE—DR. EUGENE CARDER

PRAYER

RECESSIONAL HYMN (All standing. During last stanza the chorus and characters marched from room.)

"Forward thro' the ages,
In unbroken line,
Move the faithful spirits
At the call divine:
Gifts in differing measure,
Hearts of one accord,
Manifold the service,
One the sure reward.

Chorus:

"Forward thro' the ages
In unbroken line,
Move the faithful spirits
At the call divine.

"Wider grows the kingdom,
Reign of love and light;
For it we must labor,
Till our faith is sight.
Prophets have proclaimed it,
Martyrs testified,
Poets sung its glory,
Heroes for it died.

"Not alone we conquer,
Not alone we fall;
In each loss and triumph
Bound by God's far purpose
In one loving whole,
Move we one together
To the shining goal!" (3)

(1) Author: W. G. Tarrant.
(2) Third stanza written especially for this occasion by S. L. Fahs.
(3) Author: F. L. Hosmer.

Scene from play given by eighth-grade class—Galileo, about to climb the Tower of Pisa, is explaining his experiment with the dropping of two different sized weights.

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TEN YEARS!

On the first Sunday of October ten years ago Dr. Fosdick preached his first sermon as pastor of this church. It will be recalled that he had accepted the pastorate in 1926 and had spent the intervening period in travel abroad. His leadership of the congregation has been notable in many ways. Happily for all of us this anniversary finds Dr. Fosdick and the church moving along so steadily and naturally together as pastor and people that to attempt to stress the significance of the occasion would seem to be superfluous. He and we are engaged busily together in a continuing program that does not take particular account of seasons, of years, or of decades. In these interesting and challenging days we find ourselves deeply grateful that for such a time we have as our spiritual leader Harry Emerson Fosdick.

The first issue of THE CHURCH MONTHLY came out in November of 1926 and is by that sign one month younger in the service of the church than is Dr. Fosdick. This October issue completes ten volumes of the MONTHLY. Readers who have kept a complete file have there one hundred and twenty of the sermons which our pastor has preached here, in addition to a current story of the building of The Riverside Church and of the activities which have marked the years.

We turn from the writing of this column to prepare the copy for the November issue, which will be the first in the Eleventh Volume.

▽

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